

## **US Ed. Secretary Duncan Chides Maine Legislators**

Released 6/30/09

After the Maine Senate voted twice in June to defeat public charter school legislation, US Secretary Duncan called on the Maine Legislature to “act in the best interest of students and open doors to education entrepreneurs, like those running charter schools.” He said, “Many charter school operators are today’s top education innovators and entrepreneurs. Children need more high-quality educational options.”

On June 4th and again on June 8th, just after Duncan’s telephone press conference expressly linking progress on public charter schools to a state’s eligibility for the Race to the Top funds, Maine Senators voted not to allow public charter schools in Maine.

In his June 22 address Duncan also said, “States that slow innovation are limiting opportunities for students and placing themselves at a competitive disadvantage for \$4 billion in Race to the Top Fund grants.” Secretary Duncan has been sending this same message to states since March, but Maine Senators haven’t been listening.

Maine is now likely to be out of the running for this huge pot of stimulus funds for public education, and Maine’s future taxes will go to the other states who are showing more innovation in improving their public schools using the charter school model.

Maine’s proposed bill is supported by the Maine State Board of Education, the Maine PTA, Advisory Council on Alternative Education, the Maine Association for Public Charter Schools, and hundreds of parents, educators and other citizens, including the Commissioner of Education.

Legislators will have another chance to “act in the best interests of students” in Maine by passing a charter school bill in the second legislative session next January. The state would also be able to submit an enhanced application for the second phase of Race to the Top grants in spring of 2010.

A timely bill in 2010 would also allow Maine’s participation in the Federal Charter School Grant Program, which awards 3 year grants of over \$450,000 for planning and start-up expenses for each chartered public program. These grants would be available to districts that convert or create alternative programs through the charter school model.

According to the May 20 survey by Critical Insights of Portland, 70% of Maine families want charter school options within our system of public education. In 40 other states, affordable options are allowed through public chartered schools. Educators and parents in Maine have been trying since the mid-1990’s to allow these innovative public programs in Maine. It is past time for all Maine legislators and educational leaders to support innovation with accountability through the public charter school model.

FMI, see [www.mainecharterschools.org](http://www.mainecharterschools.org) and [www.uscharterschools.org](http://www.uscharterschools.org).